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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9762
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003192

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2018

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MUTHANNA TRIBAL LEADERS SUPPORT FOR SOFA,
PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 3185

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A delegation of Shia tribal leaders from southern Iraq told Special Advisor Gray on September 24 they supported the SOFA and expanded relations with the U.S. and expressed concern about Iranian influence in the South. The sheikhs looked forward to the upcoming provincial elections and hoped the international community would play a vigorous role in ensuring the election's credibility. While ISCI and Da'wa were strong in the south, the sheikhs argued that open lists would undercut their showing in an election. The sheikhs, all from Muthanna province, decried lack of services in the south and said they hoped more financial assistance would be directed to tribes rather than political parties.
End Summary.

Support for SOFA

¶2. (C) Special Advisor Gray met with seven Shia tribal leaders from Muthanna Province in southern Iraq on September 24 in Baghdad. The delegation expressed strong support for the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and for expanding relations with the U.S. Smoking and drinking tea despite the Ramadan fast, the sheikhs assured Gray they had "no agenda" with Iran and criticized (without elaborating on) Iranian interference in the South. Gray welcomed the sheikhs' support for the SOFA and said signing the agreement was a top priority for the U.S.

Provincial Elections

¶3. (C) The sheikhs lauded the prospect of provincial elections which they said were important for Iraqi unity (Note: the discussion took place before the parliament's passage of an elections law that afternoon. End Note.). They supported the idea of open electoral lists. Expressing concern that Iraq's Independent Higher Electoral Commission (IHEC) was "controlled by political parties," they hoped the U.S. would use its influence to ensure a free and fair election. They wondered who would ensure the integrity of the ballot boxes and whether there would be a rolling election date.

¶4. (C) Gray said the U.S. shared the delegation's commitment to free and fair elections and would engage with UNAMI and NGOs on elections monitoring. IHEC and the GOI, however, would have to address questions on process and conduct. This is an Iraqi election, Gray stressed, and Iraqis have to manage it. The U.S., he stressed, has good relations with Iraq's political parties and did not support a particular party or slate of candidates. Gray agreed that open list balloting was more responsive to the needs of the Iraqi people. Poloff described the various types of technical assistance available through USG-funded democracy programs

and encouraged the sheikhs to make contact with organizations such as the National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute.

Situation in the South

15. (C) The sheikhs described southern Iraq as neglected in terms of resources and attention from the central government.

The region, with 70 percent of the population engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, needed more stable water resources and more financial support, they said. They warned that lack of central government support left the way open for outside interference. Corruption in the Public Distribution System hampered deliveries of basic foodstuffs. (Comment: At a mid-September conference on the provision of services to southern Iraq, governors and provincial council (PC) members bemoaned to GOI officials shortages in everything from electricity to medical resources to trash disposal.

Representatives from Muthanna cited a 60 percent shortage in drinking water, high land prices, and shortages in agricultural equipment as particularly acute. See Reftel).

ISCI and Da'wa

16. (C) Gray asked about the relative strength of the influential Shia Islamist party ISCI in Muthanna, as well as its coalition partner Da'wa. The delegation said the two parties were strong but predicted that the provision of open lists in the provincial elections would undercut their showing (Comment: While the wishes of the Shia religious

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hierarchy have pushed ISCI to support open lists publicly, contacts tell us that many party members privately prefer closed lists and would benefit from them. End Comment).

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